DOG SECTION **SHORTS**

WHAT WOULD EMMA GOLDMAN DO?

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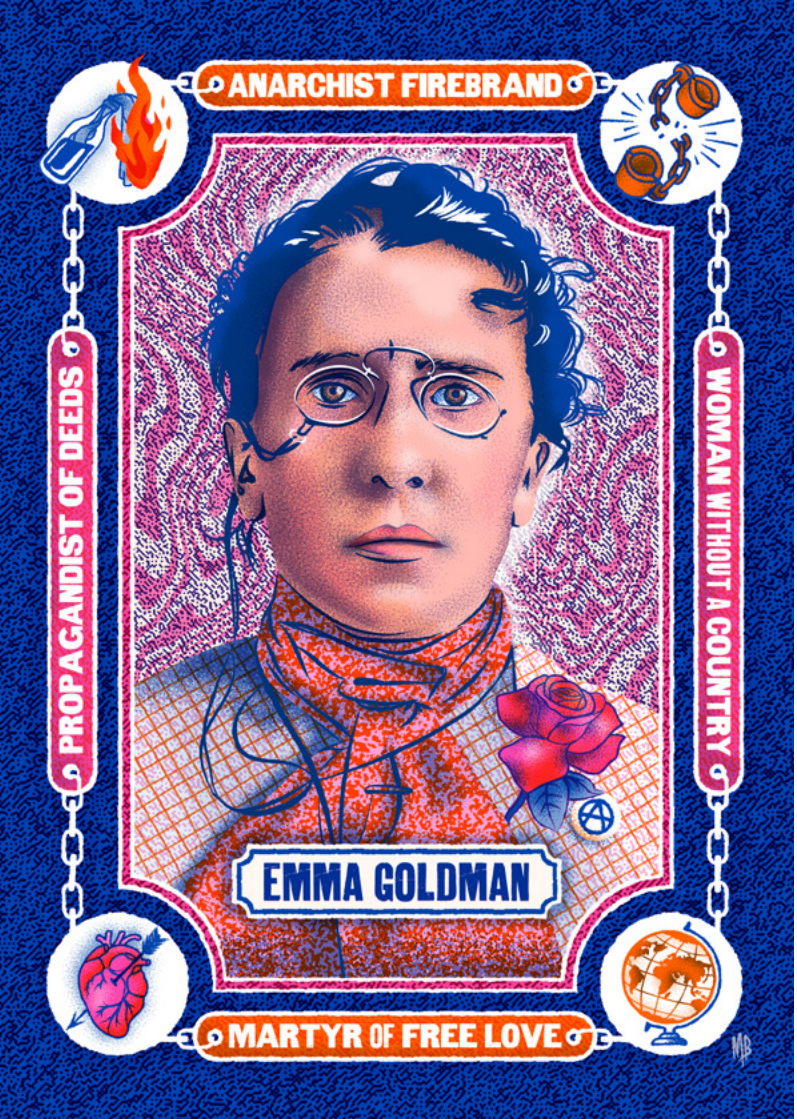
> “Twenty volume folios will never make a revolution; it is the little pocket pamphlets that are to be feared.”
>
> **VOLTAIRE**

DOG SECTION SHORTS

This pamphlet series is intended to introduce the reader to anarchism, through the thoughts and actions of various anarchists, in the hope that it will increase awareness of – and inspire involvement in – anarchist forms of organisation.

We wanted to create a beautiful object because anarchism is a beautiful idea, but we are not interested in the commodification of ideas or producing consumerist art; we are propagandists.

Therefore, we ask you to consider sharing this pamphlet once you've finished with it. In this way, the object you hold in your hand itself becomes praxis – an object that is also an act of solidarity, mutual aid and resistance – and you a part of it.



WHAT WOULD EMMA GOLDMAN DO?

WHY WE NEED EMMA

Look at the world around you – what do you see? A global assault on the bodily autonomy of women and gender non-conforming people, of which the overturning of Roe v Wade in the United States is just one part. Crackdowns on dissent maintaining a system of desperate inequalities, with police, authoritarian legislation and corporate media conspiring to destroy those who challenge that system, from climate justice movements to Black Lives Matter. Frenzied nationalism, fascist violence, an apparently unstoppable war machine, all mobilised in the name of safety and order.

When Emma Goldman looked around, she saw all these things too, and threw herself into

struggles against them. She was arrested on obscenity charges for distributing birth control literature in 1916. Her agitation against the mass slaughter of World War One saw her imprisoned and ultimately deported from the United States to Russia in 1919. She saw through the police's claims to serve and protect, arguing that all they protect is 'mountains of wealth' and that 'order [...] derived through submission and maintained by terror is [...] the only "order" that governments have ever maintained'.

Then as now, the social transformations Emma sought must have felt a long way off: abolition of police, militaries, marriage, free love; 'the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property' – and that's just for starters. But that didn't make it futile to imagine and fight for them. She believed that 'it is the struggle for, not so much the attainment of, liberty, that develops all that is [...] finest in human character' – and nothing speaks more powerfully for this statement than Emma Goldman's life itself.

She was born in 1869 in the Russian Empire (present day Lithuania) to a poor Jewish family

and emigrated to the US as a teenager. Roused by the case of the Haymarket Martyrs (eight anarchists scapegoated and executed after an explosion at a Chicago strike rally), as well as her own experiences of capitalist exploitation in a clothing factory and patriarchal domination at the hands of her abusive father, she joined the anarchist movement.

Riffing on her initials – E.G. – Kathy Ferguson describes Emma Goldman as 'an example of anarchism in life': 'living a life that produced the kind of social relations she endorsed and the form of political space for which she worked'; 'her "beautiful ideal" [...] can be seen in the text she wrote on her body, on her life world'. She was a great political theorist and writer not *despite* being a down-and-dirty agitator, a fighter in the sheets and lover in the streets, but because of it. '[T]o me', Goldman wrote, 'anarchism was not a mere theory for a distant future; it was a living influence'.

WHAT EMMA DID

Danced in defiance

'If I can't dance, it's not my revolution.' If people have heard of Emma these days, it's often through this quote, or some version of it, strewn across posters and t-shirts and song lyrics. The line grabs attention with its insistence on joy in radical politics. While she may never have said those actual words, they summarise an encounter described early in her autobiography *Living My Life*.

She recalls a ball for striking workers, where she was 'one of the most untiring and gayest' on the dance floor. A fellow revolutionary took her aside and scolded her that 'it did not behoove an agitator to dance. Certainly not with such reckless abandon', that it was 'undignified', that her 'frivolity would only hurt the Cause'. Emma was furious: 'I told him to mind his own business. I was tired of having the Cause constantly thrown into my face. I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy. I insisted that our Cause could not expect me to become a nun and that the movement should not become a cloister. If it meant that, I did not want it.'

Emma's insistence that revolutionary activity should be life affirming is well-known, but the story also tells us about another feature of Goldman's anarchism: her refusal to be cowed into a particular vision of 'correct' revolutionary activity when her integrity led her elsewhere. She spoke up for queer people at a time when many radicals considered this a distraction that would drag the movement into immorality.

Most famously, she was one of the first international voices to speak out against the authoritarian turn of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Though devastated by her deportation in 1919, Goldman was excited to witness the unfolding of the great Revolution; however, she quickly became disillusioned by a process that was already crushing human freedom and establishing a new dictatorship.

Goldman took to trying to right these wrongs: she supported the sailors of Kronstadt who were falsely labelled as counterrevolutionaries and massacred; she met with Lenin and demanded that the suppression of Russian anarchists cease; and in 1923 she published *My Disillusionment in Russia*, a landmark book detailing the bureaucratic horrors of the Bolshevik regime. In spite of (and at times emboldened by) the 'censors in my own ranks', she exposed the 'gloom and despair' of a revolution that had closed the dance halls.

Fought for peace

Emma was a constant opponent of state violence, whether it be sending the police and national guard to crush striking workers, or soldiers to wage war in other countries. No matter the colour of their uniform, they maim and kill on behalf of the same system. She argued that the devastation of war was a 'bulwark of capitalism', pitting working classes against each other in pursuit of rich men's profits. And she viewed the ideological structures that support war – 'patriotism and its bloody spectre, militarism' – as fundamentally destructive of freedom.

Patriotism, she wrote, is a dangerous superstition, full of 'conceit, arrogance, and egotism' that 'turns a thinking being into a loyal machine'. It drives people to imagine the world divided into 'little spots, each one surrounded by an iron gate'. It teaches them that their spot (and its inhabitants) are superior to others, and imposes the duty to 'fight, kill, and die' in the name of that spot.

Instead of patriotism, Emma called for international solidarity amongst the exploited people of the world: 'a solidarity which fears not foreign invasion, because it is bringing all the workers to the point when they will say to their masters "Go and do your own killing"', and which 'will eventually bring about the uprising of all the oppressed and downtrodden against their international exploiters'.

In this spirit, Emma organised tirelessly against US participation in the First World War. On joining the war in 1917, the US government set about forcibly conscripting over 2.5 million men. Opposition was limited: many socialists, feminists and trade unionists were swept up in the 'storm of unloosed war passions'. But Emma and her closest comrades held firm, horrified at both overseas imperial ambitions

and the wickedness of forcing people to fight against their will. They founded the No-Conscription League, distributing pamphlets and organising mass meetings encouraging resistance to the draft.

At these meetings Emma gave powerful speeches exhorting young men to listen to their consciences, refuse to fight the state's war, and focus instead on the 'internal enemy, which is the capitalistic class'. She did this despite the government passing laws criminalising opposition to the draft. 'I am not afraid of prison', she declared. 'I am not afraid of the authorities – I have dealt with them before – and rather, they have dealt with me'. Even as the government, police and jeering crowds of 'patriotic ruffians' attempted to ban and break up their meetings they persisted, until in June 1917 Emma and her comrade-lover Alexander Berkman were arrested 'for conspiring against the draft' and sentenced to two years in prison.

Loved freely and fiercely

'Love', wrote Emma, is 'the strongest and deepest element in all life, the harbinger of hope, of joy, of ecstasy'. It is 'the defier of all laws, of

all conventions'. This 'all-compelling force', she argued, cannot 'be synonymous with that poor little State and Church-begotten weed, marriage'. Long before the feminist movements of the 1970s, Emma saw how the compulsory institutions of marriage and monogamy serve to squash human (and especially women's) freedom: to delegitimise loves and lives existing outside their narrow strictures, and to trap those within.

In 1889, Emma began an intimate, lifelong relationship with Berkman, whom she affectionately called Sasha. Soon into their relationship she fell in love with both Modest 'Fedya' Aronstam and the famous anarchist Johann Most. She realised that the world-changing principles of anarchism – 'freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things' – must apply to personal relationships too. Love and lovers must be free. Care cannot be caged within the 'legitimate' family unit. What today gets called polyamory was for Emma simply anarchism in action.

Throughout her long life, Emma maintained passionate comradeships, friendships, situationships. She was unflinchingly loyal to her close people,

and often in conflict with those – whether lovers or strangers – who sought to corral her into domestitude. One such lover was Most, who separated from Emma upon realising she would not play the role of traditional wife and mother. Most was bitterly jealous of Sasha. This personal animosity shook the anarchist movement following Berkman's attempted assassination of Henry Clay Frick in 1892. Frick was an anti-union steel magnate who contracted private agents to carry out a deadly attack on striking workers. Berkman faced jail, or worse, and many in the movement rallied to his defence; however, while Most had previously been a prominent advocate of 'propaganda of the deed', he now used his influential newspaper to denounce Berkman and urge other anarchists to abandon his cause: 'Hardly a week passed without some slur in the Freiheit [Freedom] against Sasha or myself'.

Emma resolved to challenge Most publicly. After a written demand that he 'prove his insinuations' received no response, she turned up at his lecture with a horsewhip concealed in her cloak.

'When he got up and faced the audience, I rose and declared in a loud voice: "I came to demand

proof of your insinuations against Alexander Berkman." There was instant silence. Most mumbled something about "hysterical woman," but he said nothing else. I then pulled out my whip and leaped towards him. Repeatedly I lashed him across the face and neck, then broke the whip over my knee and threw the pieces at him.'

Emma was bundled out of the meeting by her friends, Fedya amongst them, as an angry crowd of Most supporters descended on them. But Emma thought little of such risks when defending her beloved comrade.

ACTIVITY: WHAT WOULD EMMA DO?

Now it's our turn. How will we breathe Emma's example into practice? Turn to your friends, your classmates, neighbours, comrades, siblings, or to your own thoughts. Imagine: a time-machine hurtles Emma into your daily life. You take her under your wing, show her how to use a smartphone, and invite her to walk with you a while. Here are some situations you might encounter. How would Emma respond?

Scenario 1

The military have set up recruitment stalls in your neighbourhood, school, campus, or workplace. What would Emma do?

Scenario 2

On the way home with friends from a night out, you see someone pinned to the ground by a group of police officers. What would Emma do?

Scenario 3

You're invited to an exciting party but are asked not to bring your friend, who is trans*, as they are 'too in your face' and 'make people uncomfortable'. What would Emma do?

Scenario 4

Your neighbour is facing deportation as part of a government assault on undocumented migrants. What would Emma do?

There's no single 'right' answer to these questions, of course, because we're conjuring encounters that never happened, just as 'utopia' names a place

that never existed. As Emma might say, that's the beauty of it. To channel her spirit doesn't mean always getting it right. It means letting loose our imaginations.

> **"My life – I had lived in its heights and its depths, in bitter sorrow and ecstatic joy... I had drunk the cup to the last drop. Would I had the gift to paint the life I had lived!"**

EMMA GOLDMAN
1869-1940

MORE TO EXPLORE

All quotations are from these sources. Emma's works are freely available online.

In her own words

Living my Life (In 2 Volumes).

My Disillusionment in Russia (including *My Further Disillusionment in Russia*).

Anarchism and Other Essays.

'We don't believe in conscription', speech delivered at the Harlem River Casino, New York City, 18 May 1917.

By others

Ferguson, K., 2004. 'E.G.: Emma Goldman, for Example', in D. Taylor and K. Vintges, eds, *Feminism and the Final Foucault*, University of Illinois Press, 28-41.

Hartman, S., 2021. 'The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner', in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, Serpent's Tail, 229-256.

Rossdale, C., 2015. 'Dancing Ourselves to Death: The Subject of Emma Goldman's Nietzschean Anarchism', in *Globalizations*, 12(1): 116-133.

PLAYLIST

Baby, I had an abortion – Petrol Girls (2022)

Emma Goldman would have beat your ass – Evan Greer (2021)

Daloy politsey – Fayvish (2010)

Ouvrez les frontières – Tiken Jah Fakoly (2007)

Police state – Dead Prez (2000)

Black steel – Tricky and Martina Topley-Bird (1995)

El pueblo unido – Inti-Illimani (1975)

Les anarchistes – Léo Ferré (1969)

I wish I knew how it would feel to be free – Nina Simone (1967)

Joe Hill – Paul Robeson (1956)

Funeral march from Piano Sonata No. 2 – Frédéric Chopin (1839)

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Also in this series:

Are You An Anarchist?
David Graeber and Want Some Studio

OTHER DOG SECTION PRESS TITLES

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Solidarity Economy Association

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Internationalist Commune of Rojava and Matt Bonner

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Koshka Duff and Cat Sims

Great Anarchists
Ruth Kinna and Clifford Harper

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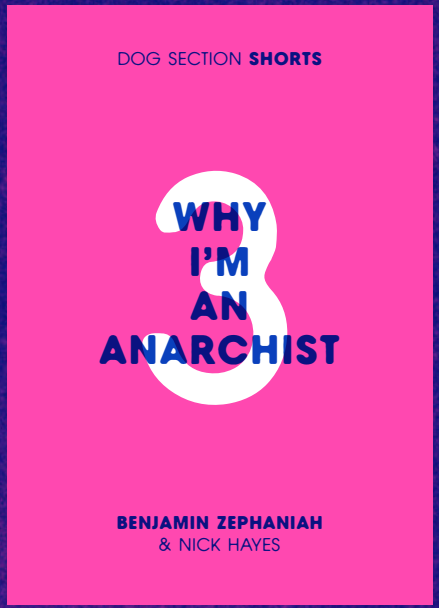

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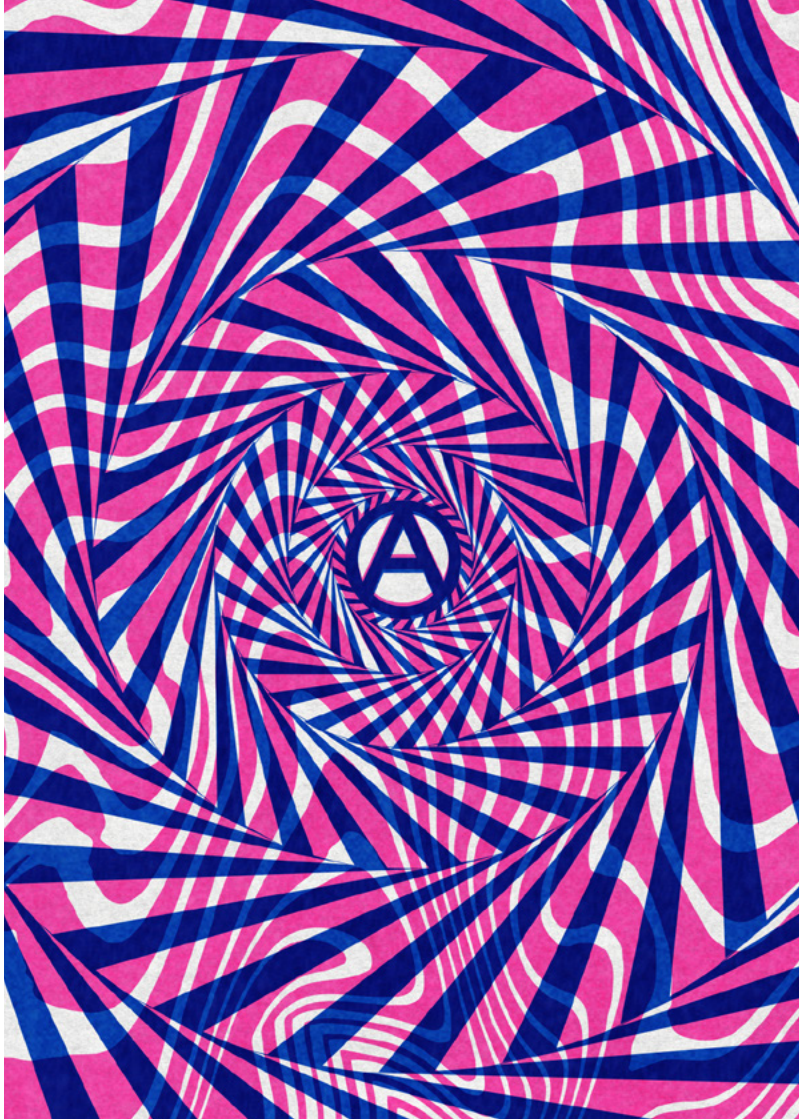

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